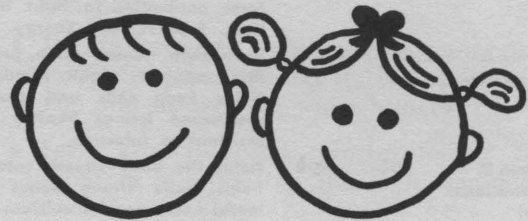


FACT SHEET

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FEEDING THE PRESCHOOLER

Sally Springer*



Food plays an important part in the growth and development of preschool children. After infancy, a child continues to need essential nutrients despite a slower growth rate. And during the preschool years a child will learn to know and like most of the common foods he will eat throughout life.

Nutrient Needs

The preschool child needs a diet high in nutrients because of continued growth and increased activity during these years. Table 1 (next page) illustrates the nutrient functions and needs of preschool children.

Daily Food Plan

A reliable guide for insuring that a preschool child gets all the nutrients needed is the Daily Food Guide. This guide can be used as a basis for planning meals and snacks for the entire family.

Milk Group

Lowfat, skim, whole and flavored milks, buttermilk, ice cream, cheeses and custards comprise milk group foods. They are important in the diet of preschool children because they supply essential calcium, protein, riboflavin, and vitamins A and D.

The amount of milk recommended for preschool children is 2 to 3 cups daily. Part of the milk may be eaten in the form of cheese, ice cream and custards.

Here are pointers for making milk group foods fun for children to eat:

- Use small glasses that fit the child's hand. Refill when necessary.
- Let an older child pour his milk from a pitcher.
- Try introducing new flavors to milk, such as chocolate and fruit.
- Serve foods containing milk, such as cooked cereal, custard, ice cream and cottage cheese.
- Cut cheese in cubes. These are good finger foods.

Meat Group

The meat group includes meat, poultry, fish, eggs, peanut butter and dried beans or peas. These foods are especially important for their protein, iron and B-vitamin contribution to the diet.

Children need at least two servings of meat each day. During the early preschool years, the size of the serving should be small. When the child is 5 he will be eating the same size serving as adults, the equivalent of three ounces of meat, two eggs, one cup cooked dry beans or peas and four tablespoons of peanut butter.

Here are pointers for making meat group foods fun for children to eat:

- Serve only tender meats before age 2 or 3, the age at which all the teeth have appeared.
- Serve meat ground or cut up into bite-size portions.
- Remove skin and bones. A child may eat the bite-size pieces with his hands.

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TABLE 1
NUTRIENT FUNCTIONS AND NEEDS OF CHILDREN AGES 1 TO 6
Recommended daily allowance*

Nutrient	Ages 1 to 3	Ages 4 to 6	Function
Energy (kilocalories)	1,300	1,800	Supply energy for work and play.
Protein (grams)	23	30	Builds and repairs all body tissues. Helps build blood and form antibodies to fight infection. Supplies food energy.
Vitamin A (International Units)	2,000	2,500	For growth, normal vision, protection against night blindness. Helps keep skin and mucous membrane linings healthy and resistant to infection.
Vitamin D (International Units)	400	400	Helps the body absorb calcium; helps build strong bones and teeth; necessary for calcium and phosphorus utilization.
Vitamin E (International Units)	7	9	Works as an antioxidant; helps maintain integrity of red blood cells.
Ascorbic acid (milligrams)	40	40	Helps make cementing substances that hold body cells together; makes walls of blood vessels strong; helps the body resist infection and helps healing; necessary for healthy gums and body tissues.
Folic acid (micrograms)	100	200	Helps prevent certain forms of anemia; necessary for formation of blood cells.
Niacin (milligrams)	9	12	Essential for growth, carbohydrate metabolism, health of skin, mouth and tongue, functioning of stomach, intestines and nervous system.
Riboflavin (milligrams)	0.8	1.1	Helps cells use oxygen; necessary for health of eyes; necessary for growth; promotes normal nerve structure; helps keep skin, tongue and lips healthy.
Thiamin (milligrams)	0.7	0.9	Promotes growth; aids in changing starches and sugars to body energy; aids digestive processes; maintains appetite; helps keep nervous system healthy.
Vitamin B ₆ (milligrams)	0.6	0.9	Works with enzymes to aid the body in using food.
Vitamin B ₁₂ (milligrams)	1.0	1.5	Helps prevent certain forms of anemia; necessary for formation of blood cells.
Calcium (milligrams)	800	800	Helps build bones and teeth; helps clot blood; helps muscles contract and relax normally; delays fatigue; helps tired muscles recover.
Phosphorus (milligrams)	800	800	Essential for proper development of bones and teeth. Helps regulate muscular and nerve action.
Iodine (micrograms)	60	80	An essential component of thyroxine and other iodine-containing thyroid gland compounds. Prevents endemic goiter.
Iron (milligrams)	15	10	Combines with protein to make hemoglobin, the red substance in blood that carries oxygen to cells.
Magnesium (milligrams)	150	200	Activates enzymes.
Zinc (milligrams)	10	10	Functions as part of enzymes and insulin.

*Food and Nutrition Board, National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, Recommended Daily Dietary Allowances, Revised 1973.

- Keep flavorings and seasonings mild; children prefer bland foods.
- Serve a variety of meats: sauteed liver, well-done pot roast, hamburger, meat loaf, tender steaks, chopped chicken, hot dogs, fish (with bones removed).

Fruit and Vegetable Group

This food group helps build strong bones, promote growth and contribute to the general well-being of the child. Dark green leafy and yellow vegetables are good food sources of vitamin A. One vitamin A-rich food should be included in the diet at least every other day.

Citrus fruits, tomatoes, cauliflower, strawberries and greens are outstanding sources of vitamin C. A vitamin C-rich fruit or vegetable should be eaten every day.

Four servings of fruits and vegetables are recommended daily. A serving of fruit or vegetable consists of 1 tablespoon for each year of age until a half cup is reached. Thus, 4 tablespoons or ¼ cup would be considered a serving for a 4-year old.

Here are pointers for making fruit and vegetable group foods fun for children to eat:

- Prepare foods so the child can chew them. Carrot strips and unpeeled crisp apples are not appropriate for a one-year old. Instead, serve cooked carrots or applesauce.
- Use fruits and vegetables to add color to the meal.
- Serve uncooked soft fruits such as bananas or ripe peaches and cooked vegetables to a child of any age.
- Add chewy and crisp fruits and vegetables to the diet as teeth erupt.
- Serve finger foods such as raw carrot strips, pepper rings and turnip strips to the older preschool child.
- Serve some vegetables (especially the strong-flavored vegetables—spinach, cabbage, cauliflower) raw if the child does not like them cooked.
- Serve fruits, fruit juices and vegetables as snacks.

Bread and Cereal Group

Enriched breads and cereals, rice, cornmeal and pastas are included in the bread and cereal group of foods. This food group supplies energy for the active preschooler. Enriched breads and cereals are good sources of iron and the B-vitamins. Four servings daily of this food group are recommended for both children and adults.

Here are pointers for making bread and cereal group foods fun for children to eat:

- Chop fresh fruits and serve on cereals.
- Cut toast in interesting shapes (squares, circles).
- Make small sandwiches of a meat spread, peanut butter or soft cheese as finger foods.

Most children eat more than three meals a day. Their stomachs are small, and they cannot hold as much food as an adult. Here is an example of a daily meal and snack plan for a family with pre-school children.

Breakfast:

Fruit juice
Cereal with milk

Mid-morning snack:

Milk

Lunch:

Meat or cheese sandwich
Vegetable strips or fruit
Milk

Mid-afternoon snack:

Cookie or fruit

Dinner:

Meat
Potato
Milk
Dessert

Empty-calorie foods, such as most candies, cakes and soft drinks should not be served as habitual snacks. These foods supply calories, but very few other essential nutrients. Children may develop a strong liking for these foods and prefer to eat them rather than more nutritious snacks.

Serving Foods to Preschoolers

Make eating a pleasant experience for children. Children can benefit from eating meals with the family because children are great imitators and learn good eating habits from adults. However, at first it may be desirable for a child to eat at his own table in the kitchen where spills and splatters make no difference. Make mealtime a happy time for children.

- Give the child a chance to quiet down before mealtime. He cannot enjoy the meal if he is tired or overexcited.
- Use child-size dishes and utensils the child can handle. He will enjoy feeding himself.

- Allow the child some freedom in the choice of foods served. This enables him to develop independence and feel grown up like the other family members.
- Serve small servings. A plate heaped with food is discouraging to a child. It is better to serve seconds than to have food left on the plate.
- Do not force-feed a child. If he is not hungry, do not make a fuss over it. His appetite may lag, and he will eat when hungry.
- Serve attractive and colorful foods. Serve foods in a form that the child can handle and chew easily.
- Serve meals at regular times. Make mealtime a relaxed and calm time. Do not rush through the meal.
- Allow the child to eat by himself. He will spill food and finger food with his hands. This is how a child learns the feel and texture of foods.
- Introduce new foods in small amounts along with the favorite foods.
- Have a positive attitude about the food. If the child does not like the food, do not make an issue of it; serve it again in a different way.

Feeding Problems

Food habits are learned early in life and are hard to break whether good or bad. In some respects the second year is the hardest year for a child in eating. He is being offered new and different foods; he is trying to feed himself and develop independence, and he is often frustrated by what he cannot do. Parents can help children by understanding some of these problems and learning how to cope with them.

One of the most common problems among preschoolers is their refusal to eat. This is normal, and the child should not be forced, bribed or punished. Omitting a meal occasionally will not harm a healthy child. Perhaps he ate too many snacks or a sweet snack before mealtime. The typical preschooler has a variable appetite, and some days he may not be hungry.

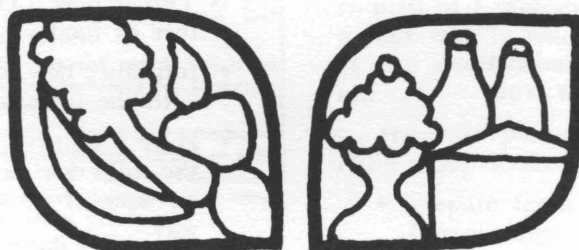
Another problem is food dislike. The child may not like a certain food, or he may simply be asserting his independence by refusing it. When a child does not like a food, do not make an issue of the situation. After offering the food for a reasonable length of time, remove it and try serving it a different way on another day. Children are entitled to food likes and dislikes just as adults are.

Food "jags" are common among children and occur when a food or certain food combinations are eaten often. This is normal. The best way to handle this problem is to avoid making an issue of it, because it probably will not last long. Humor the child for a few days.

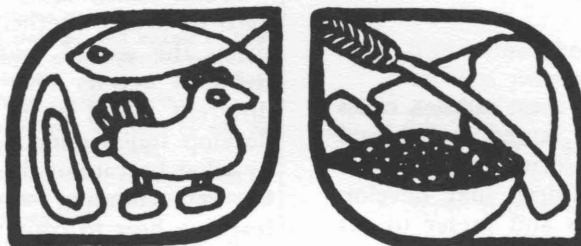
A child often dawdles over meals. Because his attention span is short, he may lose interest after the first pangs of hunger are satisfied. If the child learns that this will make a scene at the table he

may use this as a way of getting attention. After a reasonable amount of time remove the food and do not offer any until the next meal. Sometimes the child may dawdle over the food if it looks like too much, so serve smaller amounts. Do not rush the child through the meal—he may just be a slow eater.

Adults can help children form good eating habits and patterns by understanding them during this period and by serving as good examples.



Eat the basic 4 foods every day.



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